

many sheep sheared for their wool or killed as sacrifices, Israelites were well aware of the submissive nature of sheep. Jesus, as the Lamb of God (John 1.29), quietly submitted to his death. He did not try to stop those who opposed him; he remained silent rather than defend himself (Matt. 26.63a; 27.14; 1 Peter 2.23). He was willingly led to death because he knew it would benefit those who would believe” (John A Martin).

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (v. 9) – so remarkably fulfilled in the death of Jesus.

“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer...” (v. 10). Peter could say to the crowd at Pentecost, “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2.23). Through the Lord’s will, his life was given as a “guilt offering”. The righteous Servant will justify many, bearing their iniquities (Is. 53.11).

“...he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (v. 12) – “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23.34).

**Reflect:**

- Paul wrote, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.8). Thinking about Isaiah 53 and about the events of Good Friday, what does it mean to us personally that “Christ died for us”?
- In what ways can we allow that reality to penetrate our life?



Studies from the book of Isaiah

by Peter J Blackburn

7. *By His Wounds*

Reading: Isaiah 52.13-53.12

The land of Persia was once ruled by a wise and beloved Shah who cared greatly for his people and desired only what was best for them.

One day he disguised himself as a poor man and went to visit the public baths. The water for the baths was heated by a furnace in the cellar, so the Shah made his way to the dark place to sit with the man who tended the fire.

The two men shared the coarse food, and the Shah befriended him in his loneliness. Day after day the ruler went to visit the man. The worker became attached to this stranger because he “came where he was”.

One day the Shah revealed his true identity, and he expected the man to ask him for a gift. Instead, he looked long into his leader’s face and with love and wonder in his voice said, “You left your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to eat my coarse food, and to care about what happens to me. On others you may bestow rich gifts, but to me you have given yourself!”

**Reflect:**

- Consider this story. How likely is it that a person of authority would humble themselves and befriend people *in cognito* as it were? In what sense could this be a kind of parable of the Incarnation?
- The “parable” is limited (as all parables are), for the Shah has “given himself” in friendship. But – is it possible to give yourself sacrificially, in the place of someone else? What examples can we recall where that has actually happened in our society?

**The Servant’s Exaltation**

**Read: Isaiah 52.13-15.**

In the previous study we were thinking about the Servant of the Lord. Some passages seem to refer to the whole nation of Israel, some to the

God-fearing faithful remnant. Yet others seem to be about an individual, the promised Messiah.

Already in 49.7 we have seen that the one who was “despised and abhorred by the nation” will be exalted. This theme is developed in the present passage immediately before the description of the Servant’s suffering in chapter 53.

Many people “were appalled at him – his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness...” (52.14). But that’s not the end of the story, because “he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” (v. 13b).

“So will he sprinkle many nations...” – the Hebrew is the same word used for the ceremonial sprinkling with blood to cleanse from sin – “...and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand” (v. 15).

**Reflect:**

- It is rather difficult for us to think about these verses without having in mind Paul’s words in Phil. 2.9-11 which actually contain an allusion to Is. 45.23. “Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess...” It isn’t a question of whether it is fashionable to believe. If he is Lord, then what?
- Why do you think the prophet speaks of the Servant’s exaltation before he presents the graphic picture of the Servant’s suffering?

## The Servant’s Suffering

### Read: Isaiah 53.1-12.

In chapter 11 we noted that, whatever might happen to Israel, a stump would remain from which the shoot of Jesse would spring. The promised one is also called the root of Jesse.

Isaiah speaks as if it has already happened as he describes how the Servant “grew up before him [i.e. before God] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground” (v. 2a). “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (v. 2b). He didn’t look like a royal person. In appearance, he was nothing out of the ordinary – nothing that marked him out as “the Servant of the Lord”.

Indeed, instead of being one recognised and acknowledged, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (v. 3). He was the most important person – the very Servant of the Lord – but they rejected him as a non-entity.

**Reflect:**

- Recall Jesus’ parable of the tenants in Matthew 21.33-46 – the rejection of the servants and the Son. Why was the rejection of the Servant a rejection of their own identity and mission?

Verses 4 to 6 and 8 speak of the vicarious nature of the Servant’s suffering. We may have “considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted”, but he “took up our infirmities”, “carried our sorrows”, “was pierced for our transgressions”, “crushed for our iniquities”, “stricken for the transgressions of my people”. The punishment he endured “brought us peace”. The wounds he suffered have brought us healing.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6).

He was “rejected by men”. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”. Here we have on the one hand the human sin that caused the Servant’s suffering and on the other the Lord’s redemptive action to deal with human sin and guilt through that very suffering.

**Reflect:**

- When James and John came to Jesus wanting the best places in the Kingdom, Jesus said, “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10.43-45). What a totally different view of leadership! How do these words of Jesus relate to Isaiah 53.4-6?

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (v. 7).

“The tendency of sheep is to follow others (v. 6), even to their destruction. In verse 7 the quiet, gentle nature of sheep is stressed. Seeing